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INSTRUCTIONS AND REGULATIONS

FOR THE

F A S T of L E N T, 1791,

ADDRESSED TO THE

FAITHFUL OF THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT.



Now therefore, saith the Lord, be converted to me with all your heart, in fasting, and in weeping, and in mourning. Joel ii. 12.

THIS was the exhortation of the prophet Joel: the exhortation which that prophet made the people of Judah, after he had denounced from the part of God, the evils then impending over their heads: and since the solemn fast of Lent is approaching, a fast descended to us from the Apostles, and consecrated by the uninterrupted observance of the Church through every age, in what style can I address you with more propriety than in that of the prophet?

We have sinned, my brethren, we have done evil before the Lord: we have been ungrateful under all the blessings of our Creator, we have abused his favours, and turned his own gifts against him; we promised to renounce the devil with all his works, the world with all its pomps, and corrupted nature with all its temptations, yet when we take a view of our lives, what else do we discover, but almost an uninterrupted homage paid to these enemies of our God? Justice demands satisfaction; the injury done to the majesty of the Godhead by the sins of men must be repaired: and if justice be allayed with mercy in our regard, if instead of rendering to us according to our works, our most gracious and merciful God indulge us with time and means of making atonement, Oh! despise not the riches of his goodness, patience and long-suffering: the benignity of God leadeth you to penance.

Behold now is the acceptable time, behold now is the day of salvation. A faithful observance of this time of penance will necessarily be a mortifying exercise; corrupt nature ever seeks what is gratifying to the sensual appetite, and shrinks from every penal restraint on flesh and blood: but who can say that he has not deserved to suffer eternal torments through the inordinate gratification and the criminal indulgence of those passions, which make this mortifying exercise necessary? Happy they who avert the divine vengeance, although it may cost them the utmost severity of fasting, sackcloth and ashes! Better that we should fast, weep and mourn here, than that we should endure the rigours of Divine Justice hereafter.

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To animate ourselves in the observance of this penitential fast, let us go down in spirit into that dismal place where everlasting horror dwelleth, and take a view of that raging fire, which the breath of the Lord as a torrent of brimstone hath enkindled; a view of those everlasting flames, created for vengeance, in which the lost souls are tormented; and then say what these souls would do, were they released from their torments, with the grant of six weeks wherein to do penance and reverse their doom? How would they spend these forty days? Would they let the days pass away without making any advantage of them? Would they receive so great a grace in vain? No: neither the example of a dissipated world, nor the solicitations of inbred corruption, nor the hardest circumstances, to which you can suppose virtue may be reduced, would have power to withdraw them from laying hold of the proffered mercy and going through the work of expiation. Oh! what rigours should we observe in fasting and mortification! what cries should we hear of repenting sinners!

And ought not a like fervour to be shown by us now upon this summons of mercy? Sin must be punished either in the present world, or after that we have departed this life; and we know not how soon we may be called upon to appear at the judgment seat of God. Death wanders uncontroled through all the ranks of life; neither youth, nor strength, nor honours, nor riches can secure you from his power: it may come to pass that before the six weeks of the approaching Lent be compleated, your souls may be demanded, and your state for eternity decided.

As the circumstances of this district require some mitigation in the external observance of this Apostolical Fast, it behoves us to compensate for such a relaxation of discipline. In this view go frequently to the house of God, and with contrite and humble hearts offer up with your Pastors the great sacrifice of the Altar. Every day will that propitiatory sacrifice be offered to disarm the wrath of the Almighty, to move our Father in Heaven to let mercy take place of justice; do you unite your prayers with those of the Priests of the Lord. Distinguish these days of penance by much pious reading, fervent prayer, and abundant works of mercy. Supply by these means what you are not capable of doing by fasting and abstinence, that you may be included in the number of those who are doing penance for sin, and may be found worthy of sharing with them in that mercy which is promised to the truly penitent.

A L L O W A N C E S F O R L E N T.

1. Flesh meat is allowed on all Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays for five weeks, beginning with the first Sunday and ending with the Thursday before Palm Sunday. On the Tuesdays and Thursdays this allowance is only for once in the day.
2. Eggs are allowed on all days, excepting Ash-Wednesday, the Fridays, and the four last days of Holy-Week.
3. Cheese is allowed every day, excepting Ash-Wednesday and Good-Friday.



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